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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [IC](#)
SUBJECT: ICELAND: PEACEKEEPING TAKES ON A MORE CIVILIAN LOOK AFTER
REPORT ON 2004 "CHICKEN STREET INCIDENT"

Ref: 06 REYKJAVIK 431

Classified by: Amb. Carol van Voorst for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) Summary: On August 26, Minister for Foreign Affairs Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladdottir announced that Icelandic peacekeepers would only in rare circumstances carry arms, and that civilian and military tasks would be more clearly separated in future peacekeeping assignments. Gisladdottir made the comments in response to an MFA-commissioned report on the suicide attack on Icelandic Crisis Response Unit (ICRU) peacekeepers in Kabul in October 2004. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) will stop manning the seven positions where Icelandic peacekeeping forces have had to carry weapons in Afghanistan. Instead, civilian, unarmed specialists will be offered for these jobs. The FM's decision is the latest sign of a shift towards development aid that reduces the impact of Icelandic contributions to NATO's and ISAF's operations in Afghanistan. End Summary.

12. (U) On October 23, 2004 three Icelandic peacekeepers serving in Afghanistan were injured in a suicide bombing at a store on Kabul's Chicken Street that killed an 11-year-old Afghan girl and a 23-year-old American woman. Icelanders were shocked by the news, as much by television images of the peacekeepers wearing military uniforms and carrying weapons as by the attack itself. By and large, Icelanders had been under the impression that their peacekeepers were fulfilling civilian tasks in Afghanistan, though the Government of Iceland had allowed them to carry weapons pursuant to force protection requirements and be issued military rank.

13. (U) In April of this year, FM Gisladdottir announced that she had asked two former Supreme Court justices to investigate the 2004 attack, with a particular emphasis on the Icelandic Government's reaction to the incident. This new interest came out of renewed efforts by opposition members of parliament to press the MFA on the issue of compensation for the victims of the attack. FM Gisladdottir presented the report at a press conference at the MFA on August 26. The main findings included:

- Icelandic authorities should better delineate between military and civilian tasks fulfilled by the ICRU.
- Icelandic authorities have not yet paid disability benefits to two of the three Icelandic peacekeepers who were injured in the attack. The authorities should expedite this process.
- In the 2004 incident the Icelandic peacekeepers took appropriate advance security precautions and reacted properly in every way.
- A detailed set of rules on the specifics of travel in danger zones should be drafted. The set of rules should note whether personal travel in danger zones should be authorized.
- All decision-making on individual trips by peacekeepers shall be meticulous, and the roles and jurisdiction of individual supervisors

on such trips should be defined.

-- Risk assessment of individual trips into danger zones should be made, and situations that could conceivably give terrorists space and opportunity to organize and execute attacks should be avoided.

-- A systematic plan listing the appropriate responses to incidents, such as the one on Chicken Street, should be in place.

-- The justices criticize Icelandic authorities for not initiating a systematic investigation into the incident after it took place. Such an investigation could have shed light on how and why the incident occurred and what lessons can be learned from it.

¶4. (U) At the press conference FM Gisladdottir stated that the work of the ICRU should be strictly limited to civilian tasks. She said that only specially trained people, who are authorized to carry weapons when working domestically (e.g., police officers and the Coast Guard's Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit), would carry weapons when working for the ICRU. According to Gisladdottir, the MFA will stop manning the seven positions with ISAF where Icelandic peacekeeping forces have had to carry weapons and have been assigned military ranks for the period of their assignment. All seven positions are part of Iceland's detachment overseeing NATO operations at Kabul International Airport. Civilian, unarmed specialists will be offered for these jobs to the extent that ISAF security regulations permit. MFA contacts have clarified that at present, there is no plan to keep filling these posts should incumbents be required to carry arms.

¶5. (U) Reaction to the report was minimal, but, as expected, Steingrímur Sigfússon, Chairman of Iceland's leading opposition party the Left-Green Movement (LGM), welcomed the Foreign Minister's new policy on the ICRU and said it conformed better to the Left-Green vision of Icelandic peacekeeping. Sigfússon bemoaned, however, that

REYKJAVIK 00000195 002 OF 002

the FM stopped short of outlawing any carrying of arms by Icelandic peacekeepers. The Campaign Against Warfare (formerly known as the Union of Military Base Opponents) said this was an important step away from the "militarization of the ICRU."

¶6. (U) The lawyer for the three peacekeepers who were injured in the attack seized upon the report's recommendations and said his clients might sue the Icelandic state if it did not pay their claims for disability benefits, including lost wages, medical expenses and related pain and suffering. The three peacekeepers have been engaged in a battle with the state as to whether it is liable to pay compensation, given that the incident did not take place in Iceland. FM Gisladdottir said at the press conference that the MFA will take a careful look at their case, and see what the ministry can do to expedite the processing of the case. The plaintiffs' lawyer says he is optimistic that a solution could be found, and that he was scheduled to discuss it at a meeting at the MFA on August 28.

¶7. (C) The Foreign Minister's announcement was not universally lauded within her ministry, as working-level contacts in the ICRU office and the Icelandic Defense Agency (which handles operational ties to NATO) expressed frustration over the new rules. Though resigned to Gisladdottir's views on arming Icelandic peacekeepers, these contacts noted to EmbOff that the new rules were overly limiting and hampered Iceland's ability to make a worthwhile contribution to peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Some contacts admitted that they will just have to wait "until the next elections" (in 2011) before there will be hope of a policy change in the other direction.

¶8. (C) Comment: FM Gisladdottir's decision to stop manning the seven positions in Afghanistan that require arms is in sync with her policy of improving the domestic image of the ICRU, and continues a trend begun by her immediate predecessor. Gisladdottir's decision now is also reminiscent of her move to withdraw Iceland's sole representative at NATO Training Mission-Iraq in September 2007, a move later lampooned by the U.S. t.v. show "The Daily Show" to some embarrassment here in Reykjavik. The FM has been under pressure from pacifist elements in her own party as well as the Left-Greens, who have long advocated pulling out the ICRU from war zones, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Those close to Gisladdottir may hope that this most recent change to the ICRU operating procedures will carve out some breathing space on the left. In April 2007, Gisladdottir's predecessor, Valgerdur Sverrisdottir, pulled out the Icelandic mobile

liaison teams working under ISAF at PRT Chaghcharan in Afghanistan's Ghor Province. Gisladdottir appears to be set on continuing a similar policy. By restricting the carrying of arms to the small pool of those who are previously authorized to do so in Iceland, and try to fill civilian positions instead, Gisladdottir has shown a clear indication of her preference for development aid over security-oriented assistance in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, this effort seems blind to the fact that this greatly reduces the operational value of Iceland's support to ISAF. End Comment.

VAN VOORST